ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
West Fork Jacobsen Spring Creek Restoration

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted sections 87-1-272 through 273, MCA that direct Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in streams and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. This legislation was amended again in 2013 to open the program to all native fish species (statute section 87-1-283). The program now calls for the enhancement of native fish through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the FFIP.

The FFIP is proposing to provide partial funding to a project intending to improve habitat in a section of stream that has been negatively affected by livestock and undersized culverts. The stream channel would be restored to a more natural configuration, and riparian vegetation would be added to provide streambank stability and cover.

I. Location of Project:

The project site is located on West Fork Jacobsen Spring Creek, a tributary to West Fork Jacobsen and the North Fork Blackfoot River, within Township 14 North, Range 12 West, Section 1 and Township 11 North, Range 11 West, Section 6 in Powell County (Attachment 1). It is located about 4 miles southeast of the town of Ovando, adjacent to Highway 200.

II. Need for the Project:

One goal within FWP's Statewide Fisheries Management Plan for the fisheries management program is to "protect, maintain, and restore native fish populations, their habitats, life cycles, and genetic diversity to ensure stewardship of native species and to ensure angling opportunities whenever possible." By implementing habitat restoration projects through the FFIP, this critical goal can be achieved. This project would create additional habitat and nursery areas for species currently occupying Jacobsen Spring Creek, potentially including westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project would restore approximately 1,500 feet of stream channel to a more natural dimension, pattern, and profile by utilizing natural channel design and appropriate bank and instream treatments (Attachment 2). The restored channel system would be self-maintaining and allow for proper sediment transport. Native riparian vegetation, including sedges, shrubs, and trees, would be established along the streambanks. A defined stream channel with proper widths and depths should help reduce stream temperatures in West Fork Jacobsen Creek and Jacobsen

Creek. Three undersized stream crossings would also be upgraded (one with a larger culvert, two with pivot crossings) to accommodate channel function, fish passage, and ranch maintenance needs. A grazing management plan would also be incorporated, including exclusion of the riparian area. This project would obtain the proper permits for construction.

The total estimated cost for this project is $38,200. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to $7,500. The remaining funds will come from other sources and from in-kind services:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife		$10,000
Landowner	$4,750	
Trout & Salmon Foundation		$1,500
Chutney Foundation		$10,000
Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited	$4,450	
TOTAL = $30,700		

IV. Environmental Impact Review Checklist:

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment

Project Title: West Fork Jacobsen Spring Creek Restoration
Division/Bureau: Fisheries Division / Habitat Bureau (FFIP)
Description of Project: The FFIP tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project calling for the restoration of a stream section that has negatively affected by livestock and undersized culverts. The stream channel would be restored to a more natural configuration, and riparian vegetation would be added to provide streambank stability and cover.

A. POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)			X			X
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality			X			X
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species				X		
9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species			X			X

B. POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation				X		
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		X
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

V. Explanation of Potential Impacts on the Physical Environment.

3. Water quantity, quality, and distribution.

No changes in streamflow would occur in West Fork Jacobsen Spring Creek as a result of the proposed project. Short-term increases in turbidity may occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota (318 authorization).

5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

This project would restore the stream channel and upgrade three stream crossings, which would disturb vegetation in the riparian area during construction. However, the affected area would be revegetated appropriately. Long-term impacts are considered positive and would enhance natural riparian function.

10. Changes to abundance or movement of species.

The culvert replacement and channel restoration should increase stream connectivity by creating additional suitable habitat for fish species currently residing in Jacobsen Spring Creek and the North Fork Blackfoot River drainage. This impact is considered positive and could increase the abundance of fish in West Fork Jacobsen Spring Creek.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

8. Cultural and historic resources.

No cultural or historical resource impacts are anticipated. However, the State Historical Preservation Office will be notified of this project and any potential concerns will be addressed.

VII. Narrative Evaluation and Comment.

There are no anticipated cumulative effects.

VIII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative.

If no funding is provided through the FFIP, either the applicant would have to seek additional sources of funding to complete the project, or the existing impaired section of West Fork Jacobsen Spring Creek would remain untouched.

2. The Proposed Alternative.

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to restore a section of stream that has negatively affected by livestock and undersized culverts. The stream channel would be restored to a more natural configuration, and riparian vegetation would be added to provide streambank stability and cover.

IX. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section.

1. Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:

North Powell Conservation District, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

None.

3. Is an EIS required?

No. We conclude, from this review, that the proposed activities will have an overall positive impact on the physical and human environment, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

4. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the FFIP has been posted on the FWP webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the FFIP. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The EA will be distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter and will be published on the FWP webpage: **www.fwp.mt.gov**.

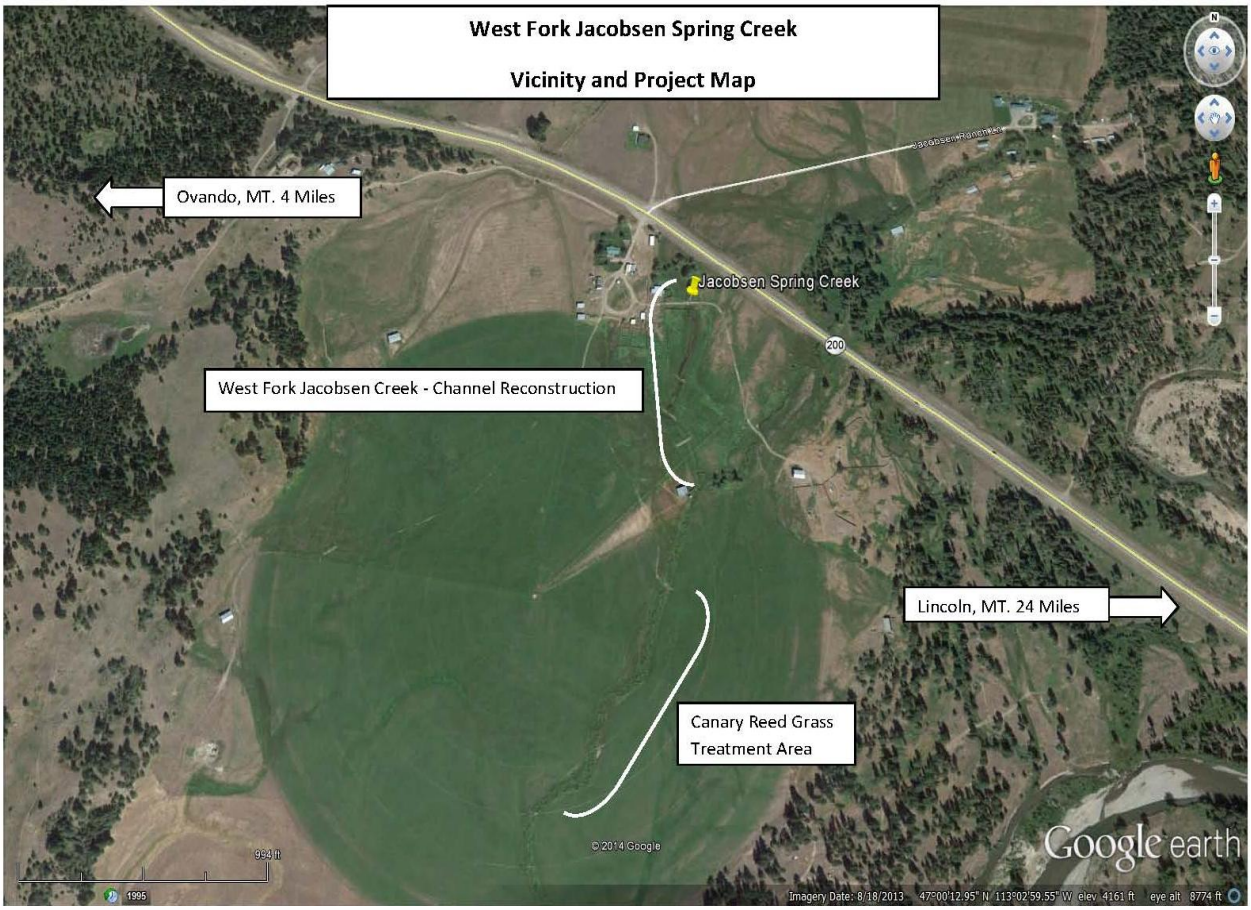
5. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on February 16, 2015.

6. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue, PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620
Telephone: (406) 444-2432, E-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

ATTACHMENT 1



ATTACHMENT 2